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FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8975  
INFO RUEHAA/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3575  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9788  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4191  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0079  
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0918  
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 002181

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/28/2017

TAGS: PHUM PGOV SOCI UZ

SUBJECT: PRISON OFFICIAL DENIES ABUSE OCCURS IN UZBEK  
DETENTION FACILITIES

REF: A. TASHKENT 2083  
1B. TASHKENT 1822  
1C. TASHKENT 2132  
1D. TASHKENT 1448  
1E. TASHKENT 2150

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary: On December 27, poloff met with Norbobo Rakhimov, the Deputy Director of the MVD's Directorate of Prisons (GUIN), who provided poloff with useful information, including the current number of prisons and prisoners in Uzbekistan. Rakhimov reported that the Government has not carried out any executions since at least 2005 and denied a rumor circulated by an independent website that it was building a new prison for high-level government officials. While he discussed GUIN's efforts to combat the spread of tuberculosis in prisons, we doubt that its current efforts are adequate. Rakhimov also disputed reports of inmates being abused by prison officers, claiming that such reports lacked credibility. In addition, he confirmed details from press reports about the December 2007 amnesty (septel). While we welcome GUIN's apparent willingness to discuss alleged incidents of prisoner abuse, Rakhimov's claim that such abuse does not occur rings hollow. End summary.

STATISTICS ON PRISONS AND PRISON POPULATION

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12. (C) On December 27, poloff met with Norbobo Rakhimov, the Deputy Director of the MVD's Directorate of Prisons (GUIN), who reported that there were approximately 34,000 inmates currently in Uzbekistan's prisons. GUIN oversees a total of 53 detention facilities, including 10 pre-trial detention centers, one prison, 20 closed correctional camps, and 22 open correction camps. Closed correctional camps are treated much like prisons, and inmates are not allowed to leave their confines. On the other hand, inmates at open correctional camps are able to find work with employers outside the

compound, but must return at night unless they receive special permission from the camp director to live with their families off compound. Employers who wish to hire inmates must sign a contract with the camp director. Inmates are allowed to keep their salaries, unless their verdict specifically indicates that their income is to be docked a certain percentage. According to Rakhimov, open correctional camps house first-time offenders, those sentenced to less than five years, and those who have already served two-thirds of their sentences at other correctional facilities.

¶3. (C) Rakhimov estimated that about another 4,500 individuals are held in pre-trial detention at any one time, although he said he could not provide an exact number because not all pre-trial detention facilities are under GUIN administration.

RAKHIMOV DENIES REPORTED CONSTRUCTION OF NEW PRISON FOR HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS

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¶4. (C) In September, the independent Ferghana.ru website carried a report from human rights activist Surat Ikramov that the Government was constructing a new prison in Tashkent to house high-level officials convicted of crimes. Rakhimov was familiar with the rumor, but denied that it was accurate. He believed that it was based on the fact that the Government is building a new prison in Tashkent which will exclusively house those sentenced to life in prison. According to him, the construction of the new prison was necessary, as Uzbekistan did not previously sentence individuals to life terms (Note: The Government passed a law this year which will formally abolish the death penalty as of

January 1, 2008 and replace it with prison terms of twenty years or life. End note.) He noted that the prison had room for approximately 400 inmates, but estimated that it would take "several decades" to fill as very few inmates have been granted life sentences. According to him, the Uzbek criminal code currently only allows for individuals to be sentenced to life imprisonment under statutes 97 part 2 (aggravated intentional killing) and 155 part 3 (terrorism). He further noted that there were no individuals convicted of terrorism sitting in Uzbek prisons.

NO EXECUTIONS SINCE 2005

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¶5. (C) When asked by poloff, Rakhimov said that the government has not carried out any executions since at least ¶2005. Rakhimov said that the Supreme Court is set to review the cases of all individuals currently sentenced to death and will decide which sentences should be commuted to 20 years' imprisonment and which to life imprisonment.

RAKHIMOV CLAIMS SUCCESS IN COMBATTING TB IN PRISONS...

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¶6. (C) Rakhimov reported that the Government has been taking active steps to combat the spread of tuberculosis in Uzbek prisons in recent years. Since 2001, the German government has provided annual grants to GUIN to hold trainings and seminars for its staff. Rakhimov reported that approximately 70 percent of GUIN's medical personnel had already received the training. GUIN also has received medical equipment from the German government, including x-ray equipment for 12 of its correctional facilities and a portable x-ray device that can travel between facilities. In 2004, the government worked with the World Health Organization (WHO) to draft an action plan to combat multi-drug resistant tuberculosis. GUIN officials, including Rakhimov himself, have participated in several international conferences organized by the WHO.

¶7. (C) Rakhimov estimated that approximately 1,000 inmates currently suffered from TB, including its active and inactive forms. He said this number has steadily declined since GUIN instituted the DOTS treatment program for inmates in 2004. He said that inmates diagnosed with TB are transferred to the

Tashkent Republican Clinic for Prisoners ("Sangorod") for treatment.

...BUT REALITY IS MORE COMPLICATED

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¶8. (C) After the meeting with Rakhimov, poloff discussed what he had been told with USAID health advisor, who was more skeptical of GUIN's efforts to combat the spread of tuberculosis in prisons. In particular, he noted that GUIN and the MVD have failed for over a year and half to fully engage on plans to create a technical assistance working group to address tuberculosis in prisons which would also include the WHO, the Global Fund, Medicines Sans Fronteirs (MSF), Project Hope, and the TB institute and DOTS treatment clinic. When Project Hope, an international health NGO that operates an anti-TB program in Uzbekistan, requested documentation from GUIN last year on TB in prisons as part of a Central Asia-wide evaluation, GUIN failed to provide them with any documents relating to prisoner health. There is also no information available regarding the implementation of DOTS treatment inside of prisons, while the implementation of DOTS treatment outside of prisons has been fraught with difficulties.

¶9. (C) USAID health advisor noted that a decline in the number of individuals infected with TB is an inappropriate statistic to use to evaluate anti-TB efforts. GUIN could

simply be failing to diagnose many TB cases among prisoners. Furthermore, x-ray equipment alone would not detect all cases of TB; lab work is also required. Instead, GUIN should be using the case detection rate and the successful treatment rate to evaluate its anti-TB efforts.

¶10. (C) USAID health advisor also noted that a significant area of concern is what happens to inmates with TB after they are released. He noted that many persons who contract TB in prisons serve only short periods of time (often because they are amnestied) and it is unknown how many of them have access to treatment outside of prisons. Some of these individuals may have started the DOTS treatment while incarcerated and failed to continue it when released, possibly leading to the further spread of multi-drug resistant varieties of TB. Part of the problem is that persons are provided treatment where they are legally registered. However, due to the social stigma of being an ex-convict, many former inmates chose to resettle in new locations, often close to prisons, where they are not registered.

RAKHIMOV DENIES ANY ABUSE OF PRISONERS

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¶11. (C) Contrary to numerous allegations made by human rights activists and family members of inmates being abused, even tortured and killed, by prison officers, Rakhimov claimed that there were no credible reports of such abuse in Uzbek prisons. He added that not a single GUIN employee was formally investigated or convicted of abusing prisoners in 2007.

¶12. (C) Rakhimov was clearly uncomfortable when poloff asked about specific allegations of abuse. He denied that inmates Takhir Nurmuhammedov and Fitrat Salohuddinov were tortured to death at a prison in Andijon in November (ref A). Instead, he said Nurmuhammedov died of an unspecified illness in Sangorod and Salohuddinov died of an unspecified illness at the Andijon prison. Rakhimov also denied reports that imprisoned human rights activist Mutabar Tojiboyeva's health has deteriorated and that she has been denied adequate medical treatment in prison (ref B). He stated that her illnesses, which he insisted were not severe (although he did not know what they were), predated her incarceration and assured poloff that she had been provided adequate medical care. Rakhimov looked especially exasperated when poloff asked whether GUIN had examined allegations that Ikhtiyor Hamroev, the son of human rights activist Bakhtiyor Hamroev, was beaten in a Jizzakh prison and later stabbed himself in

protest (ref C). Rakhimov replied that Ikhtiyor was initially involved in a fight with another inmate. After prison authorities demanded that he write an explanation describing his role in the altercation, Ikhtiyor allegedly started accusing prison guards of abusing him. Rakhimov added that the Jizzakh prison director told him on December 24 that Hamroev was in good health and able to work without difficulty. He also noted that Ikhtiyor is being held in an open correctional camp and that his family is free to visit him at any time.

¶13. (C) On December 26, poloff spoke over the phone with Bakhtiyor Hamroev, who was able to visit his son a second time in prison since the stabbing and confirmed that his health has been improving. Hamroev also told poloff that he did not travel from Jizzakh to Tashkent to meet with the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman as scheduled on December 17, as he was reportedly told in advance by his unnamed "source" inside the Ombudsman's Office that the meeting would not go forward.

¶14. (C) During the meeting with Rakhimov, poloff reinforced the importance of opening a direct line of communication with GUIN to verify allegations of abuse made by human rights activists and family members. Rakhimov agreed with poloff about the importance of maintaining communication with the Embassy, and told poloff that in the future he could freely call GUIN Chief of Staff Major Yevgeniya Lankevich, who was also present at the meeting, to inquire about any specific allegations of abuse. Rakhimov also noted that the MVD often posts press releases on its website ([www.mvd.uz](http://www.mvd.uz)) rebutting claims of abuse made by human rights activists. After the meeting, poloff checked the website and indeed found press releases in Russian attempting to rebut statements by human rights activists on the Nurmuhammedov, Salohuddinov, and Tojiboyeva cases.

#### RAKHIMOV EMPHASIZES HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING FOR EMPLOYEES

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¶15. (C) Rakhimov told poloff that GUIN cooperates jointly with the Conrad Adenauer Foundation (CAF), the Human Rights Ombudsman, and the National Human Rights Center to provide human rights seminars and training for GUIN employees. He noted that the training, which has involved German experts brought in by CAF, is held roughly on a monthly basis and was conducted in every province of Uzbekistan in 2007. Rakhimov also noted that the MVD academy continues to include human rights training as part of its curriculum for all officers.

#### GUIN STILL WAITING ON ANSWER FROM ICRC ON PRISON MONITORING

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¶16. (C) When poloff inquired about access to prisons for independent observers, Rakhimov said that GUIN had prepared a list of prisons for International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) monitors to visit this spring, but said that the ICRC visited only one prison in May. He added that GUIN recently had given the ICRC a list of prisons to visit again, but said that it has not had any communication with ICRC in the past few weeks. (Comment: ICRC, whose prison monitoring program in Uzbekistan has been suspended since December 2004, told us earlier this year that they ended the May prison visit once it became clear that they would not be granted full and unfettered access to all prisoners (ref D). More recently, ICRC told us that they would not restart prison visits until the GOU engages them in serious dialogue based on the findings of previous rounds of ICRC visits (ref E). End comment.)

#### COMMENT

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¶17. (C) We welcome GUIN's promise to open a channel of communication on alleged prisoner abuse between poloff and Lankevich, but we will have to test to see whether this promised cooperation actually materializes. In addition,

Rakhimov's claim that there are zero cases of abuse in Uzbek prisons is itself simply not credible. We will continue to inform our Government counterparts that the most effective way to combat abuse is to reopen Uzbek prisons to independent monitors and to provide them with unfettered access to all inmates, including political prisoners.

¶118. (C) GUIN appears to understand that tuberculosis in prisons is a serious problem, but we doubt that their current efforts are adequate to fully address the issue. In our meetings with Government officials, we will encourage greater GUIN and MVD engagement in the creation of a working group to combat the spread of TB in prisons.

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